

INTRODUCTION

Name: Ellen Polimeni

Position: Mayor of Canandaigua

Credentials: 40 year resident of Canandaigua

Middle School House Principal

6 term Mayor

Past President and Executive Board Member of the New York State

Conference of Mayors

REMARKS

Good Morning! Welcome to the Chosen Spot! Canandaigua means just that, chosen spot, and we feel it describes our wonderful city and surrounding town. My remarks this morning are slightly revised from those submitted to the CARES Commission over a month ago. This is because I have a clearer understanding of the immensity of your job. The decisions you will be making will affect millions of people, not just veterans, who need to be the primary focus, but many others who are caregivers and are associated with VAs across the US..

I have read the DRAFT report and would like to point out that the analysis of Canandaigua is not in keeping with our own. I am not sure why, but I do find it perplexing. Being protective of our wonderful facility it makes one suspicious regarding the process and manner in which the report was generated. Other participants today will

speak to some of the discrepancies and I will give you a list at the conclusion of my remarks.

The minutes of a February 2003 CARES meeting say “CARES is not downsizing. It is all about reallocation of resources.” Veterans in the Canandaigua area would say, IT IS DOWNSIZING because taking away services and forces veterans to drive over an hour and a half in any direction for care. This lessens service to veterans. Outpatient Satisfaction Scores rate the Canandaigua facility 9 points better than the national average and 4 points higher than the Network2 average, thus placing it in the highest echelon of VAs and best in Network2. Canandaigua IS NOT a facility warranting downsizing. I would like to share some impacts to our veterans and community.

1. The report states that beds would be bought in nursing facilities for various cases. Nursing homes in the area are already at a 92% occupancy rate so where will these beds come from?
2. It is indicated that some patients would be able to use local doctors. Leaders in our local health system indicate there is a 1 to 2 month wait to see local doctors at this time. Would this be providing ‘quality care’?
3. Our Thompson Health Care System, which received the Governor’s Award for Excellence in 2000, has reviewed the plan and shared the following with me:
“Our community will be strained to provide the health care services that will be lost if the Canandaigua VA is closed. We will be losing more than the VA Hospital. Thompson Health is part of a compassionate community support system that provides care to hundreds of honored veterans. The loss of our local

medical network that effectively and efficiently supports the unique health care needs of our veterans will:

- Displace families;
- Displace medical services; and
- Fragment the efficient coordination of care that's unique to Canandaigua.

We care about the health of our veterans and want to provide them excellent health care close to home. Unfortunately, closing the VA hospital will take some of the “caring” out of health care and put our veterans “on the road.”

But, disabling this system will not only hurt veterans. The VA Hospital is woven into the fabric of our community's health care system. Our entire community will pay through increased health care costs of \$1.5 to \$3.0 million per year if this piece of our health care system is just ripped away.

I have representatives of Thompson Health with me today who can speak to these figures if you have questions.

Is the real issue providing quality health care to veterans or lowering costs? In the summary notes of the initial meeting of the CARES Commission it was noted that Secretary Principi “challenged the Commission to make tough calls and not let political and parochial interests detract it from doing what is right for the Nation's veterans.” I would agree with Mr. Principi but must say the report you are receiving is rife with politics – VA politics and parochial interests.

If the focus of CARES is to have quality care available for our veterans and lower health care costs I would respectfully submit that the Canandaigua model is a model to be replicated because it is proven effective and it would lessen the angst caused by announcing closures in the less urban areas.

Let me explain the Canandaigua model. In 1999 the Canandaigua VA began a partnership which has existed since and which saves dollars. David Smith, Director of the campus like setting on Fort Hill Avenue, has worked diligently to make use of the facility and has contracted with Day Care Agencies and the Canandaigua City School District which uses facilities for an alternative program for high school students. These partnerships have covered maintenance and upkeep costs and provided a good connection to the community.

We, the residents of Canandaigua take pride in our VA. We understand the “dollars” issues but, we feel our model is one that can address “dollar” concerns in a much more palatable fashion and with much less impact on veterans and the community. I also feel we can grow the model. Canandaigua is a community that comes together and solves issues! We have a wonderful campus here and there are many things we can do together that will serve veterans and in turn serve the community.

Please scrutinize the report you are reviewing. The omissions regarding Canandaigua, the data provided and the process employed to create the report are to be questioned.

Ladies and gentlemen we feel the figures in the draft report do not support the closing of

the Canandaigua VA. I hope your tour of the facility has given you a better understanding of Canandaigua and the Canandaigua V A.

Please allow the Canandaigua VA to remain open. I pledge that WE will work to grow our model and partnership and make it an exemplar for others to follow. Thank you for coming to Canandaigua, the chose spot.

(Due to time restrictions today I have collected information that I would like to present the commissioners at this time. Please review these carefully.) Thank you and I will take questions or as I mentioned representatives of Thompson Health and the Canandaigua City School District are here to take questions.

Ellen Polimeni
10-20-03